

11 From Metaethics to Action Theory

Work on Scotus's moral psychology and action theory has been concerned almost exclusively with questions about the relationship between will and intellect and in particular about the freedom of the will itself. In this chapter I broaden the scope of inquiry. For I contend that Scotus's views in moral psychology are best understood against the background of a long tradition of metaethical reflection on the relationship between being and goodness. In the first section of this chapter, therefore, I sketch the main lines of that tradition in medieval thinking and examine the novel and sometimes daring ways in which Scotus appropriated them. In the sections that follow I elaborate on three areas of Scotus's action theory, very broadly conceived, in which his modifications of the medieval metaethical tradition can be seen bearing philosophical fruit. Thus, in the second section I examine his account of the goodness of moral acts, in the third his understanding of the passive dispositions of both sensitive appetite and will, and in the fourth his account of the active power of will.

I. BEING AND GOODNESS

Following Scott MacDonald we can distinguish two general approaches to the relation between being and goodness. The central claim of the *participation approach*¹ is that all beings are good because, and to the extent that, they participate in the Good itself. In *Republic VI*, for example, Plato argues that the Form of the Good is somehow responsible for both the being and the intelligibility of all the other Forms, and thereby of all other things whatsoever. As MacDonald notes, "Later Platonists, especially the neo-Platonists,

developed this strand of Plato's thought into a full-fledged cosmology⁷² according to which all things emanate from, and ultimately return to, the Good. Although Christian thinkers saw that the doctrine of creation required them to deny emanationism, they saw no theological reason to deny participation – in fact, they found in the Platonist doctrine of participation a powerful theoretical tool for understanding creation. Both Augustine and Boethius, for example, held that creatures are good because they participate in and are caused by God, who is identified with the Good of Platonism. The participation approach makes goodness something extrinsic or relational: the goodness of a being either is or depends on that being's relation to something else. Consequently, this approach also requires some sort of explicit theology or at least a doctrine of the Forms, since one cannot explain the goodness of a being without making reference to the nature of the Goodness in which that being participates and the nature of the participation-relation itself.

The *nature approach*, by contrast, "starts from an identification of the notion of the good with the notion of an end."⁷³ A thing is good because, and to the extent that, it has attained the end or goal characteristic of beings that have its nature. The characteristically Aristotelian expression of this approach understands natures themselves as teleological. Thus, to *be* an *x* at all is to be aimed at the characteristic end of *x*'s; to be a *good x* is to have attained that characteristic end. Unlike the participation approach, then, the nature approach makes goodness something intrinsic: the goodness of a being is simply its having attained the end characteristic of things of its kind. Consequently (and once again in distinction to the participation approach), the nature approach requires no explicit theology. Since the standard of goodness is built into the nature of each kind of thing, there is no need to refer to God or some Form of the Good in order to explain the goodness of any particular being.

Both approaches generate what MacDonald calls "the universality thesis," the claim that all things are good in virtue of their being. But the two approaches arrive at the thesis differently and construe it differently. On the participation approach, the important point is that all things, other than God himself, have being only insofar as they proceed from the Good and somehow imitate its goodness. On the nature approach, the important point is that all things are good exactly to the extent that they realize their nature, and of course

nothing can have being at all unless it realizes its nature to some extent.

The two approaches also have in common what we might call “the appetition thesis,” the claim that all things aim at the good – in the case of beings with cognition, that all desire and intentional action are aimed at what the agent cognizes as good. Once again, the two approaches construe this claim in very different ways. On the participation approach, it is not clear whether the appetition thesis amounts to very much, since absolutely everything is good in the required sense.⁴ On the nature approach, choosing what we take to be good means choosing what we take to be a good *for us*, that is, something perfective of us, something that actualizes our characteristic potentialities. Taken in this way, the appetition thesis is clearly substantive but far from obviously true. It requires an elaborate moral psychology, according to which all human appetites are aimed in some way at human perfection. It also naturally lends itself to a eudaemonistic virtue ethics, in which the virtues are understood as habitual dispositions of the various appetites by which they are aimed more reliably at the human good.

Even though the two approaches sometimes seem to pull in opposite directions, many medieval thinkers combined elements of both in their thinking about goodness. In Thomas Aquinas we see a brilliant attempt to synthesize the two approaches and to elaborate a normative ethics and moral psychology that does justice to both.⁵ Aquinas defends the universality thesis in a way that unites the two approaches. He does so by understanding the act of creation as essentially teleological: God’s creative activity is itself aimed at an end, and God brings into being creatures who are defined by their characteristic ends. And since the different sorts of creaturely being are simply different ways of imitating God, creatures participate in the divine goodness by attaining their characteristic ends. Aquinas also makes the appetition thesis plausible by showing in detail how human appetites – natural, sensitive, and intellectual – are aimed at human perfection. He identifies both appetitive and intellectual virtues by which the human good is more effectively discerned and attained in human actions and reactions.

In Scotus we see a strange fragmentation – not so much an unraveling of the Thomist synthesis as a deliberate dismantling. The creation approach remains, but the sort of goodness associated with it,

which Scotus calls “essential goodness,” has clearly lost its Platonic aura and is rigorously deemphasized. The sort of goodness associated with the nature approach, which Scotus calls “accidental goodness,” is handled in a radically revisionist way. The notion of an end remains important, but that end is no longer the actualization of distinctively human potentialities. For Scotus argues that the ultimate end of human beings is not actually within our unaided grasp; barring supernatural intervention, no amount of action on our part will get us to that end. And although less ultimate ends are also good, accidental goodness does not consist in achieving those ends. Moreover, he severs the connection between appetite and the good in two ways. First, those appetitive powers that are indeed aimed at the good (that is, at characteristically human perfection) are devalued, since the accidental goodness of particular actions is, as I have said, not a matter of attaining any such good. And conversely, the appetitive power by which we attain such accidental goodness is, and indeed must be, aimed at something altogether distinct from human perfection.

II. THE HUMAN GOOD AND THE GOODNESS OF PARTICULAR ACTS

As I said in Section I, Thomas Aquinas developed his normative ethics out of the metaethical foundations provided by his fusion of the creation approach and the nature approach. For Aquinas “the human good is the state or activity in which the actualization of the potentialities specific to human beings consists.”⁶ His account of that state or activity is what gives content to his theory of natural law and his analysis of the virtues.

Scotus’s account of these matters is distinctive in at least three ways. First, he insists that we cannot know by natural reason what the human good is, and a fortiori that we cannot elaborate any theory of normative ethics on the basis of our natural knowledge of the human good. Second, Scotus’s account differentiates sharply between moral goodness and the goodness that is coextensive with being, thereby in effect cutting normative ethics loose from the metaethics on which many previous thinkers had founded it. Finally, he describes the moral goodness of an act as involving the perfection of the act rather than the perfection of the agent, and the perfection of an act in no way involves the act’s tendency to perfect the

agent. Our evaluation of acts is therefore unrelated to any theory about what human perfection consists in (even if such a theory were available).

I begin by discussing Scotus's views about our knowledge of our ultimate end. The first question of the Prologue to the *Ordinatio* asks "whether it is necessary for man in his present state to be supernaturally inspired by some special doctrine that he cannot attain by the natural light of the intellect." Scotus provides two main arguments for an affirmative answer. First, every agent that acts for an end needs an appetite for that end. In the case of human beings, that appetite is an intellectual appetite. In other words, it is an appetite that follows upon intellectual cognition. Therefore, if human beings are to act for their end, they need a distinct cognition of that end. But human beings cannot have a distinct cognition of their end through purely natural means. This is evident, first of all, because Aristotle himself, relying only on natural reason, could not settle conclusively what human happiness consists in:

The Philosopher, following natural reason, either asserts that perfect felicity consists in the acquired cognition of the separated substances, as he appears to say in Books I and X of the *Ethics*; or, if he does not definitely assert that this is the supreme felicity of which we are capable, he does not conclude by natural reason that anything else is. Thus, in relying solely on natural reason either he erred regarding the precise character of the end, or he remained in doubt about it.⁷

Now Aristotle's failure on this score was not attributable simply to carelessness or lack of insight. Scotus insisted that we do not (in our present state at least) know the proper end of *any* substance unless it has some act in which we see that end clearly exemplified as appropriate for that substance. And in our present state we do not experience any acts by which we know that a vision of the separated substances – or anything else, for that matter – is the appropriate end of human beings. Characteristically hedging his bets, Scotus goes on to say that *even if* natural reason were sufficient to establish what the end of human beings is, it would not be able to tell us the whole story about the end. For example, natural reason cannot tell us that the vision and enjoyment of God will last forever, or that it will involve human nature in its entirety, body and soul together. But both of these facts make our end more desirable.

Scotus's second argument for the insufficiency of natural reason is as follows. In order to act for an end on the basis of knowledge of that end, one needs to know three things: first, how the end is acquired; second, what the necessary conditions are on the part of the agent for the attainment of the end; and third, that these necessary conditions are sufficient for the attainment of the end. The first requirement is obvious, since if one does not know how the end is acquired, one will not know how to dispose oneself to achieve it. The second requirement is important, Scotus argues, because if one does not know everything that is necessary to the end, one could fail to achieve the end because of ignorance of something necessary. The third requirement is more of a psychological than a logical presupposition of striving for the end. If we suspect that we might do everything necessary to attain the end and nonetheless fail to attain it (because, for example, external agencies prevent us), we will be less likely to pursue the end wholeheartedly.

In fact, Scotus says, we cannot meet any of these three requirements by natural reason alone. We cannot know how happiness is attained because the connection between our activity and the attainment of happiness is altogether contingent. No human activity produces happiness; rather, God grants happiness as a reward for certain acts that he has contingently decided to regard as worthy of eternal happiness. Since the connection between our activity and our happiness is contingent and depends wholly on the divine will, we cannot know that connection by natural reason alone. For the same reason we cannot know by natural reason that certain actions are necessary or sufficient for the attainment of happiness. Therefore, knowledge of what our end is cannot guide us in the attainment of that end unless God provides us with certain crucial information about how the end is attained.

Now in a certain sense there is nothing terribly controversial about much of this. Aquinas makes it quite clear that our ultimate happiness is beyond our own power to achieve. He affirms that "neither human beings nor any other creature can attain happiness through their own natural abilities"⁸ and that "human beings become happy by the action of God alone."⁹ Furthermore, he holds that the precise character of our ultimate end, the beatific vision, is beyond our natural understanding.¹⁰ So Aquinas would surely agree that we cannot have a clear conception of our ultimate end and

that in some sense we cannot do anything to guarantee our attaining it.

But Aquinas, unlike Scotus, has more to say about this. For Aquinas distinguishes two sorts of happiness. The happiness that exceeds our natural abilities is perfect or supernatural happiness. But human beings are also directed toward an imperfect or natural happiness.¹¹ It is here that the nature approach to the metaphysics of being and goodness bears normative fruit. For it is this imperfect happiness that serves as the norm of morality. The good to which we are ordered by the moral virtues is natural happiness,¹² not supernatural happiness. And when Aquinas sets out to give specific content to the general principle that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided,” he does so by examining those things to which human beings are naturally inclined, and which human reason therefore naturally apprehends as goods.¹³ Again, these goods are the constituents of our natural happiness, not our supernatural happiness.

So there is for Aquinas, as there is not for Scotus, a sense of ‘good’ that is available to natural reason and is important in developing a detailed normative ethics. Now it might seem puzzling that Scotus does not here introduce something like Aquinas’s imperfect happiness. For Scotus certainly does recognize that human beings have an intellectual appetite for their own good,¹⁴ and if (to use his own argument against him) we cannot have an intellectual appetite for something we do not know, it seems to follow that we must have some sort of conception of our own good. As Aquinas says, reason naturally apprehends as goods all those things to which human beings are naturally inclined. Should not Scotus admit the same thing?

That Scotus is in some sense committed to the view that there is such a thing as natural happiness, and that we have some understanding of what it consists in, I have no doubt. What makes his ethics so distinctive is that he thinks natural happiness has nothing at all to do with morality. Right actions are right, not because of their relationship to human flourishing, but because God has freely commanded them.¹⁵ This is why Scotus does not introduce natural happiness in the opening question of the *Ordinatio*. His question is whether our natural reason can tell us anything about how we ought to act. The fact that natural reason can tell us about the nature of imperfect happiness is, to Scotus’s mind, not even relevant to the question, since imperfect happiness is not relevant to the moral norms that in fact obtain.

Now recall that according to the nature approach, the goodness of a thing is a matter of actualizing the potentialities that make it the sort of being it is; it is in that sense that goodness and being are “convertible.”¹⁶ For human beings, that state of actualization or full-being is called happiness, and normative ethics gets its content from the concrete conception of happiness and the ways in which it is attained. Since, as we have now seen, Scotus rejects the idea that happiness generates moral norms, he must also reject another characteristic thesis of the nature approach: that moral goodness is just a particular case or further refinement of the goodness that is convertible with being. And indeed Scotus draws a sharp distinction between the two.

According to *Metaphysics* 6, Scotus begins, ‘good’ is the same as ‘perfect’. But ‘perfect’ has two meanings. In one sense, something is perfect when it has no intrinsic deficiency, that is, when it lacks nothing that is necessary to its being the sort of thing it is. Such a thing is said to be perfect by essential intrinsic perfection, or primary perfection: “The primary goodness of a being, which is called essential goodness, which is the integrity or perfection of the being in itself, implies positively the negation of imperfection, which excludes imperfection and diminution.”¹⁷ That this is the good that is convertible with being is made clear at *Reportatio* 2, d. 34, q. un., n. 18: “The subject of evil is not the good that is the contrary of evil, but the good that converts with being. For the evil that is the lack of secondary perfection denominates the good that is essential and primary perfection.” In other words, something cannot be an evil thing unless it is, first of all, a thing – in other words, a being. So the subject of evil, the being that the evil is present in, is some being, and thus, given the convertibility of being with primary goodness, a primary good.

It follows that evil is not the contrary of primary goodness. The argument Scotus makes proceeds as follows:

Good in the first sense can have no contrary or privation in reality. For contraries are apt to qualify one and the same thing. Therefore, something that is not apt to be present in another thing has no contrary or privative opposite. But something that is good or perfect by primary perfection, insofar as it is a primary good, is not apt to be present in another thing. Even if it could be present in another thing as far as what-it-is is concerned (in the sense that an accident is in some way perfect by primary or intrinsic perfection, since it has an essence), nonetheless, insofar as it is a first good, it bespeaks perfection in itself and with respect to itself.¹⁸

The point of this admittedly obscure argument is that primary goodness implies no relation to anything else, as an accident implies a relation to the subject in which it is present. Whiteness (for example) is present in a white thing, but primary goodness is not present in some other thing.¹⁹ Contrast this with the kind of goodness that has evil as its contrary. That kind of goodness will involve a relation; it will be present in some other thing. Not surprisingly Scotus will call this kind of goodness “accidental goodness.”

The important thing to note is that this understanding of primary goodness immediately rules it out of consideration as a useful concept for moral theory. For the good that is spoken of in moral theory needs not merely a contradictory, *not good*, but a contrary, *evil*. That is to say, ‘good’ must be a property that it is possible to be without. But nothing can be without essential perfection, since to be without essential perfection is not to be at all.

This is not to deny that essential perfection is a degreed property. It is possible for one thing to have more essential perfection than some other thing; what is not possible, however, is for two things *of the same kind* to have different degrees of essential perfection. An angel has more essential perfection (is better in terms of primary goodness) than a human being, but a good human being has no more essential perfection than a wicked human being.

Since primary good has no contrary and remains inviolate and undiminished so long as the nature survives, it is the second sense of ‘good’ that is important for moral theory. This is the good that has evil as its contrary, the good that is diminished by sin. Scotus calls it “secondary perfection” or “natural goodness.”²⁰ The most useful characterization of secondary perfection is an analogy with beauty. The beauty of a physical object, Scotus says, is not some absolute (nonrelational) quality in the beautiful object. Rather, it is the aggregation of all the qualities that befit the object, such as size, shape, and color, together with the suitable relationship of those qualities to the object and to each other. In the same way, natural goodness is the secondary perfection of some thing that is constituted by all the qualities that befit it and each other. When all these qualities are present and suitably related, the object is perfectly good. If all of them are lacking but the nature that ought to be perfected by them remains, the nature is altogether bad. If some are lacking, the nature is bad, but not altogether so.

In *Quodlibet* 18 Scotus describes this “befitting” in much greater detail: “The secondary goodness of a being, which is accidental, or supervenient upon entity, is complete conformity: either the thing’s complete conformity to some other thing to which it ought to conform, or the complete conformity of some other thing to it.”²¹ When a thing is good in the first way, in virtue of its conformity to some other thing, it is said to be good for, or a perfection of, the thing that it is good for. But it is not said to be good “denominatively,” or accidentally good in itself. It is in this way that health is said to be good for a human being. Health is a perfection suited to human nature; we therefore call health ‘good’ because a human being who possesses health is to that extent good. So when this sense of ‘good’ is at issue, Scotus says, the form is denominated from the subject; that is, we call the form (health) ‘good’ because its presence makes the subject (the healthy person) good.

When a thing is good in the second sense, because it possesses the qualities that are appropriate to it, the thing is said to be good denominatively, or accidentally good in itself. For example, an attractive, smiling face is good because it has the qualities suitable to it. When this sense of ‘good’ is used, the subject is denominated from the form; that is, we call the subject (the face) ‘good’ because it possesses various qualities or forms (beauty and so forth) in virtue of which it is good.

A human act is by nature suited to be good in both ways. That is, it ought to bear a certain relationship to its agent, and various other things ought to bear a certain relationship to it. Now the striking thing here is that in discussing the natural goodness of an act, Scotus has almost nothing to say about the relationship of the act to the agent. That is, the natural goodness of an act does not seem to depend on whether the act is good for the agent. And since moral goodness turns out to be a kind of natural goodness, it follows that the moral goodness of an act does not depend on whether that act is good for the agent.

Now we have already seen that Scotus’s rejection of the nature approach requires him to say something along these lines. But we should also notice that Scotus’s general discussion of the two kinds of secondary goodness also naturally suggests that moral goodness will not depend on the perfection of the agent. For a thing is good in itself, not because it perfects some other thing, but because some

other thing perfects it. This separation of the goodness of the agent from the goodness of the act is surely one of the most striking features of Scotus's moral theory. At *Ord.* 2, dd. 34–7, qq. 1–5, for example, Scotus describes sin as the privation of actual justice. But actual justice is defined in terms that have nothing whatever to do with the nature of the agent. The justice of an act is not a relation of the act to the agent – it apparently does not even involve such a relation as a constitutive part – but a relation of the act to a standard altogether external to the agent.

Moral goodness is simply the secondary perfection of a moral act, that is, an act elicited freely by an agent possessing will and intellect.²² Moral acts have such goodness when they have an appropriate object, end, form, time, and place as judged by the agent's own reason. This is not to say that the agent's reason somehow constitutes the appropriateness of the object, end, and so forth. Instead, the object and end are appropriate or not independently of the judgment of reason; reason's task is simply to ascertain the moral facts. As I have argued elsewhere,²³ the appropriateness of an object or an end to a given action is, except for cases of metaphysical necessity, determined by God's free choice.

III. PASSIONS AND APPETITES

Scotus's rethinking of the relationship between being and goodness involves more than simply banishing natural happiness from moral reflection and redefining moral goodness so as to eliminate reference to the perfection of the agent. It also means a thorough overhaul of the moral psychology and action theory that grew out of the nature approach. Recall that according to the appetition thesis, all things aim at their own perfection. Human beings do so on the basis of cognition. Since human beings have both sensory and intellectual cognition, they also have sensory and intellectual appetites, which are inclinations to the human good as represented by the associated cognitive power. Very roughly speaking, we might say that the cognitive power "registers" a good in a certain way or under a certain description, and the appetitive power naturally inclines to that good. A detailed moral psychology can then be developed by exploring the various ways in which sense and intellect cognize goods, the corresponding inclinations of the appetitive powers, and the variety of ways in which both cognitive and appetitive activity contributes to

or constitutes the human good. For the sake of brevity I shall call this moral psychology “the nature psychology” because it is associated with the appetition thesis as understood in accordance with the nature approach.

Now Scotus can happily accept a fair bit of the nature psychology, as far as it goes. He is certainly enough of an Aristotelian to agree that all things – human beings included – have an appetite for their proper natural end, and he accepts the distinction between sense and intellect and the associated distinction between sensory and intellectual appetite. But his rethinking of the metaphysics of goodness requires him to say more. For the nature psychology aims to explain how our actions and reactions are aimed at the human good. Since Scotus denies that the moral goodness of particular acts is determined by their relation to the human good, he must supplement the nature psychology with some account of how we choose morally good acts. And more generally, since the nature psychology is concerned with natural happiness, which Scotus thinks is ultimately of no moral relevance, it plays a far less important role in his system than it does for philosophers who adopt the nature approach. In this section, therefore, I first lay out the parts of the nature psychology that Scotus can accept. I then consider the ways in which he finds that psychology deficient. In Section IV I show how he supplements the nature psychology so as to make room for morally good acts. I conclude by raising some questions about the relationship between the Scotist revisions, the nature psychology, and Scotus’s larger project in action theory.

Scotus accepts the common view that sensory cognition is of particulars, whereas intellectual cognition is of universals.²⁴ Sensitive appetite, accordingly, is the passive power by which one is moved to some immediate response to particular objects as presented by the senses, with all their individuating conditions. Intellectual appetite, by contrast, is the passive power by which one is moved to a more reasoned response to particular objects as presented by the intellect, as falling under a generic concept like *good* or as consciously chosen for the sake of some end.²⁵ So appetitive inclinations are reactions or (in Scholastic jargon) passions; they are activated by the cognized object.

Scotus insists that there are passions in both sensitive and intellectual appetite.²⁶ Some passions concern things that by their very nature arouse desire or its opposite, and these belong to the concupiscible part of both sensitive and intellectual appetite. Other passions

concern things that arouse desire or its opposite only on account of something else, and these belong to the irascible part of both sensitive and intellectual appetite. Suppose I like music and dislike writing papers. Music arouses the concupiscible passion of love and writing papers the concupiscible passion of hate. If someone insists on turning off my music and making me write a paper, I will feel the concupiscible passion of sadness over the silence and enforced work (it is a concupiscible passion because it is in effect a desire for the absence of the silence and enforced work). I will also feel the irascible passion of anger toward the person who has interfered with my pleasure. The aim of this irascible passion is not merely to get rid of that person but to exact revenge in some way. If I am trying to exact that revenge and have not yet succeeded, I will feel an irascible passion of sadness.²⁷ If I succeed, the passion of the irascible part is "assimilated to fruition on the part of the concupiscible part," as Scotus puts it. And if I believe that I will henceforth have uninterrupted enjoyment of the music, I will feel the irascible passion of *securitas*; but if I have reason to believe that more interference is on the way, I will feel the irascible passion of fear.²⁸

Now all these passions, whether they arise in the sensitive or the intellectual appetite, are things that happen to us, not things that we do. The same is true of the general inclination of the intellectual appetite to the good. If the will – that is, the power by which one chooses and initiates actions – is merely intellectual appetite, then it will be nothing more than a passive response to whatever reason presents as good. My willing the good will be akin to my feeling flushed when I am aware that I have embarrassed myself or the rush of adrenaline that happens when I am suddenly confronted with what I recognize as a danger. Both these responses follow upon some sort of cognitive awareness, but I do not choose them and cannot control them. I just happen to be set up in such a way that I flush when I am embarrassed and release adrenaline when I am threatened. If I also just happen to be set up in such a way that I will something when the intellect presents it as good, I cannot control my acts of will either. Ultimate responsibility for them lies not with me but with whoever set up my intellectual appetite to be responsive to the good in that way.

So Scotus holds that the nature psychology makes the will entirely responsive, rather than active. Another problem with the nature psychology is that it leaves no room for us to will anything that is not

in some way associated with the human good as registered by either sensory or intellectual cognition. And as we have seen, Scotus denies that moral norms derive their force or content from the human good; he also denies that the moral goodness of actions derives from any ordering to the human good. It follows that if the nature psychology is the whole story, human beings have no power to follow moral norms or to elicit morally good acts. That is, it might sometimes turn out that we choose what is in fact morally required, but only if by some happy accident the object presented by the intellect as perfective is also the object morality requires us to will. We would never be able to choose what is right *because* it is right. And even then our actions would not have moral goodness, since moral goodness is the goodness of an act elicited by a *free* agent²⁹; we have already seen that if the will is merely intellectual appetite, it is not free, but merely a kind of passive response to intellectual cognition.

IV. THE WILL AS ACTIVE POWER

Scotus's solution to both problems is to posit two fundamental inclinations in the will: the *affectio commodi* and the *affectio iustitiae*.³⁰ The *affectio commodi* corresponds to intellectual appetite as understood in the nature psychology. The *affectio iustitiae* is much more difficult to characterize – a problem to which we will return – but one thing is certain: it provides the will with the freedom it could not have if it were merely intellectual appetite. It is, Scotus says, the “ultimate specific difference of a free appetite”³¹; that is, the *affectio iustitiae* is whatever distinguishes a free appetite from an unfree appetite. Scotus's favorite example of an unfree appetite is the sensitive appetite, and he often explains his theory of freedom by saying that if the will had only an *affectio commodi* – in other words, if it were merely intellectual appetite – it would be just as determined as the sensitive appetite in fact is: “An intellective appetite, if it lacked the *affectio iusti*, would naturally desire what is suited to the intellect, just as the sensitive appetite naturally desires what is suited to sense, and it would be no freer than the sensitive appetite.”³²

Often when Scotus discusses the two affections, he describes the role of the *affectio iustitiae* as being that of restraining or moderating the *affectio commodi*. In his discussion of the fall of Satan, for

example, he says so repeatedly:

If, along the lines of Anselm's thought experiment in *On the Fall of the Devil*, one imagines an angel that had the *affectio commodi* and not the *affectio iustitiae* – i.e., one that had intellective appetite merely as that sort of appetite and not as free – such an angel could not refrain from willing advantageous things or from willing them in the highest degree. . . . Insofar as the will is merely intellective appetite it would actually be inclined in the highest degree to the greatest intelligible good. But insofar as the will is free, it can control itself in eliciting its act so that it does not follow its inclination, either with respect to the substance of the act, or with respect to its intensity, to which the power is naturally inclined. Therefore, that *affectio iustitiae*, which is the first controller (*moderatrix*) of the *affectio commodi* with respect to the fact that the will need not actually will that to which the *affectio commodi* inclines it, or will it to the highest degree, is the innate liberty of the will. . . . It is clear that a free will is not bound to will happiness in every way in which the will would will it if it were an intellective appetite without freedom. Rather, in eliciting its act the will is bound to moderate its appetite *qua* intellective appetite, that is, to moderate its *affectio commodi* so that it does not will immoderately.³³

One has reason to restrain or moderate intellective appetite whenever the pursuit of happiness, if unchecked, would be immoral – or, in other words, would be counter to the divine will. According to Scotus, the rebel angels first sinned by willing their own happiness in a way that God had forbidden.³⁴ Because God had willed that they restrain their *affectio commodi*, they were bound to do so; because they had an *affectio iustitiae*, they were able to do so, and hence blameworthy when they refused to do so. God's will is in fact the rule or standard for every free appetite:

A free appetite . . . is right . . . in virtue of the fact that it wills what God wills it to will. Hence, those two *affectiones*, the *affectio commodi* and the *affectio iusti*, are regulated by a superior rule, which is the divine will, and neither of them is the rule for the other. And because the *affectio commodi* on its own is perhaps immoderate, the *affectio iusti* is bound to moderate it, because it is bound to be under a superior rule, and that rule . . . wills that the *affectio commodi* be moderated by the *affectio iusti*.³⁵

In other words, because it is not happiness but the divine will that grounds moral norms, we need to have the power to restrain the natural appetite for happiness so that we can will as God would have us will. The *affectio iustitiae* is what provides us with that power.

This much of Scotus's understanding seems to provide an answer to the two fatal shortcomings he saw in the nature psychology. A will endowed with the *affectio iustitiae* is no longer merely passive or responsive, as intellectual appetite is; and the *affectio iustitiae* enables us to will freely what is morally required of us without regard to happiness, so that we can elicit morally good acts. We might call this aspect of freedom "moral freedom." But Scotus's conception of freedom has another aspect, which we might call "metaphysical freedom"; and it is not at all clear how metaphysical freedom and moral freedom fit together.

The account of metaphysical freedom rests on the distinction Scotus makes between two basic kinds of active power: natural and rational. In contemporary terminology, the distinction is that the action of a natural power is necessary, given the circumstances and the laws of nature; the action of a rational power is contingent, given the circumstances and the laws of nature. (Scotus would not speak of laws of nature, but of the natures of the agent and patient, and in particular their active and passive causal powers.) For example, heat is determined by its very nature to cause heat. Unless it meets with some impediment to its action (some heat-resistant shield, say), it cannot help but cause heat. The will, however, is a rational power. There is nothing in the nature of the will that makes it act or not act in a given set of circumstances, nothing that makes it will in one way as opposed to another. Scotus hammers this point home in the *Lectura* discussion of contingency:

This logical possibility [of willing different objects] does not exist according as the will has acts successively, but in the same instant. For in the same instant in which the will has one act of willing, it can have an opposite act of willing in and for that very same instant. . . . Corresponding to this logical potency is a real potency, for every cause is prior in understanding with respect to its effect. Thus, the will, in the instant in which it elicits an act of willing, is prior in nature to its volition and is related contingently to it. Hence, in that instant in which it elicits a volition, it is contingently related to willing and has a contingent relation to willing-against – not because at some earlier time it had a contingent relation to willing, since at that time it was not a cause; but now, when it is a cause eliciting an act of willing, it has a contingent relation to the act, so that what is willing *a* can will-against *a*.³⁶

From this passage alone it is not clear whether volition is always contingent or merely occasionally so. Some contemporary

philosophers who agree with Scotus that freedom requires alternative possibilities hold that once our characters are fully formed, we are seldom free. For example, Peter van Inwagen argues that “there are at most *two* sorts of occasion on which the incompatibilist can admit that we exercise free will: cases of an actual struggle between perceived moral duty or long-term self-interest, on the one hand, and immediate desire, on the other; and cases of a conflict of incommensurable values. Both of these sorts of occasion together must account for a fairly small percentage of the things we do.”³⁷ So if I have, say, the virtue of temperance, it is not really possible for me to take that third piece of cheesecake that is offered to me; refusing it will seem the only sensible thing to do, and “if we regard an act as the one obvious or the only sensible thing to do, we cannot do anything but that thing.”³⁸ On van Inwagen’s view, then, I am not acting freely when I refuse the cheesecake, although I would still be praiseworthy if my having the virtue of temperance is itself the result of prior free actions.

Scotus, however, does not agree. Whatever habits I may have developed, virtuous or vicious, the will is still free. Even the divinely infused habit of charity does not undermine freedom. Examining the dictum that “charity is to the will what a rider is to his horse,”³⁹ Scotus comments that the analogy works only if we think of the horse as free and the rider as “directing the horse in the mode of nature to a fixed destination.” Then “the horse in virtue of its freedom could throw its rider, or else move itself toward something else, contrary to the rider’s direction toward the destination.”⁴⁰ Scotus even says that the blessed in heaven retain the power to sin, although God sees to it that they never exercise that power.⁴¹ Presumably, then, the blessed dead are no longer free, since they no longer have alternative possibilities available to them. But Scotus’s claims about the contingency of heavenly sinlessness show just how far he is prepared to carry the view that the will always remains a rational power. Even God cannot take away the will’s power for opposites; he can only raise an impediment to its exercise.

This high view of the freedom of the will is surely not what one would have expected from the doctrine of the two affections. The *affectio iustitiae* is said to confer freedom by enabling us to overcome the passivity of intellectual appetite and will what is morally required of us without regard to happiness. This would give us

alternative possibilities whenever we are confronted with a choice between happiness and morality, but surely not the seemingly unlimited alternative possibilities Scotus envisions. It is hard to see how the freedom of the blessed dead to abandon their perfect happiness and sin against God could be a manifestation of their power to will what is morally required without regard to happiness.

One might suggest a more complicated reading of the *affectio iustitiae*. Perhaps Scotus's idea is that (1) there can be no morality without freedom, (2) freedom requires alternative possibilities, and (3) if the nature of the will is such as to allow alternative possibilities sometimes, it will be such as to allow alternative possibilities all the time. In other words, moral freedom – the possession of an *affectio iustitiae* – entails metaphysical freedom. Somewhat paradoxically, then, the *affectio iustitiae* guarantees the will's power to sin. Unfortunately, there is no real evidence from Scotus's writings that he connected moral freedom with metaphysical freedom in quite this way. Moreover, (3) simply seems false. A view like van Inwagen's, in which the will is free sometimes but not always, is perfectly coherent.

It seems more likely that Scotus simply never thought through the connection between moral and metaphysical freedom. His case against the nature psychology leads him to posit an *affectio iustitiae*. A will that has an *affectio iustitiae* is certainly free in some sense. Now Scotus seems to have an *independent* intuition that freedom involves an unailing power for opposites. So he talks as if it is obvious that an *affectio iustitiae* confers an unailing power for opposites even though his arguments against the nature psychology suggest a far more restricted role for the *affectio iustitiae*.

NOTES

- 1 MacDonalld also calls it the *creation* approach. See MacDonalld 1988 and 1991b, 4–5.
- 2 MacDonalld 1991b, 4.
- 3 MacDonalld 1991b, 5.
- 4 Augustine, however, puts an ingenious spin on the appetition thesis when he argues in *Confessions* 2 that whatever we desire, we desire because it in some way imitates a divine perfection.
- 5 One reason many recent interpreters have downplayed Aquinas's natural law ethics in favor of his virtue theory – as if the two were in some sort of competition – is that they have failed to appreciate the richness

and complexity of Aquinas's metaethics. By bringing together the nature approach and the creation approach into one coherent system, Aquinas not only makes room for both natural law and virtue in his moral theory but makes each necessary to a full understanding of the other.

- 6 MacDonald 1991b, 19.
 7 *Ord. prol.*, pars 1, q. un., n. 14.
 8 *ST IaIIae*.5.5.
 9 *ST IaIIae*.5.6.
 10 *ST I*.12.4.
 11 For the significance of Aquinas's distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness, see Bradley 1997.
 12 *ST IaIIae*.62.1, 63.2, 109.2.
 13 *ST IaIIae*.94.2.
 14 See the discussion of intellectual appetite in Sections III and IV.
 15 The evidence for this claim would require far more space than I can give it here. See Williams 1998a.
 16 Convertibility is best understood in contemporary terms as necessary coextension. Standard medieval accounts deny that 'being' and 'good' are synonymous: see, for example, Stump and Kretzmann 1991.
 17 *Quodl.* q. 18, n. 5.
 18 *Rep.* 2, d. 34, q. un., n. 3.
 19 Scotus then seems to withdraw, or at least qualify, this point in the last sentence quoted. But all he means to convey there is that even if accidents, which do have contraries, are said to be primary goods (or to be good by primary goodness – his language is not consistent), we should not think that primary goodness has a contrary. We might say that a particular instance of whiteness is a primary good, since it has the appropriate sort of being. And certainly black is the contrary of white. But it is the contrary of white *qua* accidental form, not *qua* primary good; there *is* no contrary of white *qua* primary good. A particular instance of blackness will be every bit as much a primary good as a particular instance of whiteness.
 20 At *Ord.* 2, d. 7, q. un., n. 11, Scotus uses "natural goodness" to refer to what is clearly primary or essential goodness, but this usage does not accord with his usual practice.
 21 *Quodl.* q. 18, n. 3.
 22 Human acts can also be considered without reference to the agent's will and intellect. The goodness of acts considered in this way is called "natural goodness." See Williams 1997.
 23 Williams 1997 and 1998a.
 24 In fact, Scotus's distinction between sensory and intellectual cognition is somewhat more complicated: see Robert Pasnau (ch. 9 in this volume,

Section IV). But this rough statement of the distinction is sufficient to motivate the distinction between sensory and intellectual appetite as Scotus understands it.

- 25 *Ord.* 3, d. 33, q. un., n. 6.
- 26 See especially *Ord.* 3, d. 33, q. un., n. 20; d. 34, q. un., nn. 10–13.
- 27 Scotus, that is, calls both the concupiscible and the irascible passion *tristitia*. Perhaps the concupiscible *tristitia* could best be called “discontent” and the irascible *tristitia* “frustration.”
- 28 See *Ord.* 3, d. 34, q. un., nn. 10–13, for the clearest explanation of the distinction between the concupiscible and irascible passions, along with characterizations of *tristitia* and anger; see *Ord.* 4, d. 49, q. 6, nn. 22–3 for *securitas* and fear.
- 29 *Ord.* 2, d. 40, q. un., n. 3.
- 30 *Affectio commodi* is usually translated “affection for the advantageous” and *affectio iustitiae* (or *affectio iusti*) as “affection for justice.” But both translations are misleading in various ways, and it seems safer to leave the expressions untranslated.
- 31 *Rep.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, n. 9.
- 32 *Rep.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, n. 9. See also *Ord.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, n. 8; 2, d. 25, nn. 22–3; 2, d. 39, q. 2, n. 5; and 3, d. 26, q. un., n. 17.
- 33 *Ord.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, nn. 8–9. The thought experiment to which Scotus refers is found in Anselm’s *De casu diaboli* 12–14. Scotus borrowed the idea of the two affections from Anselm, but he puts them to very different use, and Scotus’s understanding of the freedom that the *affectio iustitiae* confers is quite different from Anselm’s. See Visser and Williams 2001 for discussion of Anselm’s theory of freedom and in particular the argument of *De casu diaboli* 12–14.
- 34 *Ord.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, n. 9.
- 35 *Rep.* 2, d. 6, q. 2, n. 10.
- 36 *Lect.* 1, d. 39, qq. 1–5, nn. 50–51. See Calvin Normore (Ch. 4 in this volume) for a discussion of Scotus’s modal theory.
- 37 van Inwagen 1989, 417–18. See O’Connor 2000, 101–7, for a discussion of van Inwagen’s “restrictivism.”
- 38 van Inwagen 1989, 406.
- 39 Scotus took this to be a saying of Augustine, but in fact it comes from the pseudo-Augustinian *Hypognoticon* III c. 11 n. 20 (PL 45, 1632).
- 40 *Ord.* 1, d. 17, pars 1, qq. 1–2, n. 155.
- 41 *Ord.* 4, d. 49, q. 6, nn. 10–12.